

MTM/VF EIS

Community Narrative: Werth, West Virginia

Interviewer: Basically, why don't you start off and tell Troy and I a little bit about how you and your family came to live in this area.

Resident: I was born and raised down here in Muddlety there. And I bought this place here in 1944. That is where I am living here and then the farm down there 308 and three quarter acres – bought it in 1960. And ah, course they... I sold some of it across the crick there to Tassa Coal Co. And they stripped, there wasn't much on mine. I didn't own the coal, I just owned the land. It was just over, well wasn't even an acre of it, I don't think up there, of coal. But they stripped on this mountain up here. And when they first come in there, they just went around stripped the outside and tossed it over the hill. They done all that, and this about that way here. Island Creek Coal Co. they was up on this side. And they just went around and stripped around. First cutting over the hill and the rest of it, well they pushed a lot of it over the hill. I don't know what year it was they got after them about it and not let them throw it down. But it filled the creek up here and come rain it just filled the whole crick up. And ah, I don't know after I bought the farm down yonder, I guess about 1962 or 3, I got the conservation fellers, they said they would help me line up, fill up... shoot the ditches out and shoot the crick out. And when it come time to load, they were suppose to tell me how to load, and they wouldn't do it. They said that they wasn't going to do it. So, I just went down to the low end of the farm down there and I just shot the creek from up through here. And straightened it out so that it, the water would just run all over the meadows. And it stayed pretty clean since then.

Interviewer: About when was that, do you think? How long ago?

Resident: Oh it was in about '63 or '4 when I done that shooting.

Interviewer: And what time did the first mine company come into the area? About what time?

Resident: I guess that was in, in sometime in the late forties that they first come in here. They hauled the coal out down the road here.

Interviewer: Was that underground mining? Or that was ...

Resident: That was top mines, strip mines. And they didn't have no regulations they just throwed it all over the hill, because they wanted to. And I guess it was more convenient for them than to pile it up. They would piled it up and then ... I don't know how they done that this here. But I was up there some but not much. But down on my place down there, they stripped part of it before I owned it. And there were just a couple of knolls there and I give permission to the "specific name" boys, they were starting out, and they got in there and dug it up. And then they sold it to "specific name" I believe it was. And how he was a, he was a, pretty much operator on the mine stripping stuff. They finished stripping on the mine down there and they ... that was... they leveled

it off. But they didn't... just piled up the rocks there and they just up and they back lifted up and left ridges. You couldn't, it ain't, you can't... mow it or to keep the kids out. I put lime and fertilizer on it to try and get a pasture in there for my cattle. But it wouldn't, that was in '63 or 4 that I tried to plant some pine trees down there. And they wouldn't even grow. You couldn't get nothing to grow there. I mean only, there is some of this **moss –counter 42-** and a few locust trees that “specific name” grew in there. But ah, they threw rocks over the hill and they moved the timber down that way for I don't know how long. It has been better than fifty years now and they ... It ain't done nothing now. Nothing on the top you can't grow anything.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is? Because the soil is too thin or..?

Resident: Yeah, just too thin. Too many rocks there too many rocks there. No moisture there for the trees to grow on, or that is my opinion of it.

Interviewer: Do you remember when they first came in did the coal company come and talk to you and the community at all?

Resident: Well they didn't, not on my property first. When the first ones come in here, the one came in and worked on this good one up here and they hauled their coal down the State Road. But ah, in... '52 or 3 they bought that place of mine over there, property. They put a big road down over there so that they could haul it without using the State Road. But it didn't, they didn't do that's when they throwed it over and come a hard rain the creek just fill clear up, with the dirt.

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit, a little bit more about why you moved here. When you first moved here.

Resident: Well I, I was the kind of the guy, a feller that didn't like to be pushed around by the mine company. I was working the mines. And me and the boss got into a kind of an argument. And I gave him a cussin' and he said he would fire me. And I told him go ahead; it didn't make a damn bit of difference to me. So he fired me, or wrote out the time. I took it down to the office they said they wouldn't... they wouldn't, they said they would give me the go ahead and work. But they didn't want me to quit. I told I was leaving, when a feller gives, the boss give you an order for your time, well you are suppose to quit. So, I went over here to Gauley River and went to work in the mines over there. And I was still living in Widen, but didn't... Well, I found out that this property here was for sale and so I went and bought it and moved in a house by the creek there. I just moved in here, and that is when I bought it in '44.

Interviewer: And you were working in an underground mine then?

Resident: Yeah. Yeah, I worked about 21 years in the mines.

Interviewer: So you continued to work for that underground mining company for a long time?

Resident: No, not too long. I quit them and went down here to this Peerless Coal Company and underground mined there. I worked there for a good while and then I went up to Tioga and worked, so... I was working Tioga when I quit.

Interviewer: Did you notice when the coal mining started here if there were economic benefit? Did people get jobs with them?

Resident: Well, they had some people working but it didn't seem like it helped much of any. The underground mines was more of an advantage then. The strip mines wasn't any benefit much... they didn't have over 15 or 20 fellas working for them.

Interviewer: Did you know any of those fellas? Were they anybody that they hired that had lived here before then?

Resident: Other than the "specific name" boy down here that worked for them. But, the rest of them, there were some of them from over in Braxton County and I don't know where the others were from.

Interviewer: So you would say there wasn't very many at all?

Resident: No.

Interviewer: Yeah. What did you like about living in this community when you first moved here?

Resident: Well, I was raised up four miles form here. I was born and raised in the community.

Interviewer: So it was home to you?

Resident: Yeah, yeah. I knew about all the people. I mean, when I come over here I knew about all the people that lived in the... up this way and down the other way and up next to Powells Mountain and down next to Summersville. Use to be I knew pretty near all the people that lived in Summersville, or was kin to a lot of them. I mean, my dad was raised down on the Brushy Fork there. I don't know where my granddaddy come from. I guess Maryland.

Interviewer: So, this was, so that was what you liked about it here? ...that you knew everybody?

Resident: Yeah, well it was a pretty good community. Wasn't no crooks or crime or anything like that around.

Interviewer: That is usually a good thing in a community.

Resident: A few fellas made whiskey and drunk it. But I didn't do none of it.

Interviewer: I know you got that dog across the way; he's the only crook around, huh?

Resident: Huh?

Interviewer: The dog.

Resident: Yeah. (laughter)

Interviewer: Tell me a little bit more about when you were living here and the mining came in. What kind of changes did you see in the community? Were there physical changes? ...like you said they dumped some of the stuff from the other side of the mountain and that changed the creek? Any changes to your home, for example?

Resident: No, it didn't... had a bridge across the creek over there and drove across on to the road here to go to work. It didn't change...well maybe, I mean... it changed, it had to do, my neighbor up there he had a shovel come in and clean the creek out and straighten it out and just while that backed-up, then that's when there come rain and it filled it up all the way. And mine down through here I just, well I had the shovel clean it out because it filled it up and then I got that ditch with dynamite. Got enough of it then to blowed it up so that the crick runs pretty good now.

Interviewer: Yeah. Yeah.

Resident: But I didn't have no help from anybody then.

Interviewer: Did you ever talk to them about what had happened?

Resident: No, I never talked to 'em. Nothing about that. There wasn't no use, I mean, we had no law against it, I don't reckon'. If we did, the legislation just like you are doing about the drunken drivers. They don't, they just let them do what ever they want. They give em' a day in jail and fine them a little bit. Now I seen in the Gazette where, here, about two or three weeks ago, where they tell about this terrorist attack up there that killed 6,000 people and drunken drivers in West Virginia, or not in West Virginia but in the United States, kill 16... over 16,000 each year and they don't do a damn thing about it. Looks like to me if, the government, 'course they're spending a lot of money on, about the terrorist thing, but they won't even give these drunken drivers - get them off the road.

Interviewer: Umm, humm.

Resident: They are killing 10,000 more people than the terrorist did.

Interviewer: Yeah, there are a lot of things in this country that I... that are doing worse damage than they did just in one day. It is sad. There is no question.

Resident: They do more damage; I mean cars and people, wrecking people's lives, crippling them for life and everything. They are doing a lot more damage, drunken drivers, here, in a year than most terrorist done.

Interviewer: So, but you felt talking to these guys up on the hill, wasn't going to get you anywhere.

Resident: No, it wasn't going to get you anything.

Interviewer: Okay.

Resident: They just lie about it.

Interviewer: Sorry?

Resident: They just lie about it. They stripping down on that low place down there, they coming around, it wasn't on my property but it was next to it. I wouldn't let them strip on mine down there on that seam that they was on. And they come up there; there was ah... water starting to come up in my meadow down there. I expect it was 300 yards or more. And there hadn't been no water come up there at all when I first bought the place down there. And this is when I had had it about 15 years. And I went and told them about it, "No," it wasn't their fault. It didn't make any difference; they'll deny everything. Lying don't hurt them a bit.

Interviewer: Why did you choose not to let them strip down there where you owned?

Resident: Well, I didn't like them. I let them strip after that, I mean a neighbor of mine owned land joining me there, and he said they wouldn't strip his unless they could strip mine. It wasn't... was just maybe 40 or 50 feet deep on the top of the hill there. And I felt I didn't want to keep him from selling his coal, because I wouldn't sell 'em mine. But I didn't like the people that had the mine down there. So, I done it for the fella. He had treated me right and so I thought I didn't need to hold him up on my account. But they done a good job on what they hadn't, up on the left hand-side, eastern side of it, they had stripped most of that before. On the right hand-side of the road down here, they hadn't stripped any there. But they didn't hurt that up there too much. They didn't have to go down very deep. And then at that time they didn't throw nothing over the hill.

Interviewer II: What was this meadow like before the mining operation started up? Can you remember what it was like?

Resident: Well it was good farmland all the way down through here.

Interviewer II: That was pretty much what it was used for? Crops?

Resident: Yes. Yes.

Interviewer II: Was it corn and.. ?

Resident: Well corn and hay.

Interviewer II: And that is sort of how this, what was about this community?

Resident: Yep. Yeah it was farming community.

Interviewer II: Farming community. Then the mining operations came in and I think you had said about nothing would grow down there. Is that sort of, what impact did the mining operations have on the farming community?

Resident: Well, from down what they call Crack's Fly down there, the road that goes across, the road goes across and goes over on Phillip's Run and from there up this way is pretty good shape now. But it is because of people like myself that kind of kept it cleaned out and stuff. But from there down yond way now, its, well the whole bottom just, nothing but a swamp land. There is no... you couldn't raise anything in there now. And they, the government wouldn't let them people down there at the Raven houses, they wanted to clean the creek out and sort of drain the, their septic tanks wouldn't drain good.

Interviewer II: Because the creek was backed-up and all the sediment from the spoil that was taken off, that actually caused the water not to be able to drain it just laid in there. And that what caused it to become a wetland, if you will.

Resident: It is wetland all right. But back... I remember when there was corn and hay grown and all that down there where there is nothing but a swamp now.

Interviewer: Are any ... I am sorry go ahead.

Resident: They wanted to clean it out and the government wouldn't let clean it out. Told them they could clean it out if they'd put rocks in the bottom of the creek and up both sides and it would cost over a million dollars for less than a mile to do that kind of stuff. Wasn't nobody, even this whole community, didn't have that kind of money.

Interviewer: Were there any changes to your water supply?

Resident: Well, not mine. They, ... I sold that over to the company and my water comes over there from a spring. I built me a tank over there. And when I lived across over on the other side there, I built that tank. And then when I built this over here, why, I put that water over here. When I sold it, I reserved that water tank - the spring and the water. And the fella that owns the land now, he talks about stripping over there. And I told him, I guess me and he will have another round of it. And I told him... He said he thought that he had it. Well, I said you better go and read it. You

will see that that spring is reserved. I said you better not try tearing it up. But they never bothered my water at all. But I don't know how the other people, water was.

Interviewer: Would you say there were any benefits, in the community that you could name from the mining being here?

Resident: Not that I know of. There was a few fellas from out of here, about the only one on the creek that worked was the "specific name" boy. That worked for them.

Interviewer II: Where does everybody else work around here?

Resident: Well they, some of them worked in mines over here on Gauley River and some up here for Island Creek Coal Company.

Interviewer II: So that, would you say that that was the majority of the people around here working the mines then?

Resident: No, No. I suppose that most of them just went ahead with their farming or worked some kind of County or State job. Working for the State Road and for the County and stuff like that.

Interviewer II: Did mining companies bring any, other than employment; did it bring any other benefits to the community? Like did it, was there a local store or anything that it helped support? Like the workers would come to and help support that store or anything down in Summersville?

Resident: They didn't have no... the company didn't have no stores or anything that made a benefit that I know of.

Interviewer: What about after the mining sort of wound down around here. Did you notice a significant change in the community then at all?

Resident: No.

Interviewer: Like the "specific name" that you mentioned and a few people that you knew who worked for the mines did they, for the surface mine that is, did they move on with the surface mine company?

Resident: No. No. I don't think any of them that worked here went with them.

Interviewer: Right. Okay.

Interviewer II: So the mines didn't, even back in the '40s and '50s if you will, the mining operations that was conducted at that time was really happen or occurred before there were a lot of

environmental protection laws and regulations on mining? Or if this is back, sort of, when the mining operators did what, how they saw fit, so to speak?

Resident: The cheapest way they could get the coal out.

Interviewer II: Right. ...the most economical way for them to do their business.

Resident: Yeah. That's right.

Interviewer: Do you ever see... these days, I don't know if you read the paper regularly, but do you ever see permit information published in the newspaper?

Resident: Yes. The Chronicle, that's our newspaper.

Interviewer: That's local?

Resident: Yeah, that is locally... ah in Summersville down there. They generally publish the permits. Whenever they want their money from back when they put a deposit on things, they run an ad on it.

Interviewer: Um hum. Um humm. Did you have any interaction with the coal companies when they were here? About anything at all? Complaints that people might have or what they might be doing? Or did they publish public information back then?

Resident: No, not that I know of.

Interviewer II: Were the mining permit advertisements legal advertisements?

Resident: Yeah.

Interviewer II: Were they,... Could you understand what they were meaning in terms of what were the locations of the permits? Where they were being applied for and what areas were to be mined, so to speak?

Resident: Well some of them, if they describe it, it was something I knew, the landowners was mentioned in it.

Interviewer II: Could you read the map that was published along with the advertisement of the permit?

Resident: Well, some of them yes.

Interviewer II: Some of them you could read?

Resident: And some of them I couldn't, stuff was put on there that you couldn't, or I couldn't understand it.

Interviewer II: Do you think the permits of that legal advertisement is helpful? Do you ever, ... do you think it is helpful or beneficial that that is published?

Resident: Yeah well, I think so. The people that their land is next to, it would help them.

Interviewer II: Do you know of anybody that actually ... I am familiar with that you can actually go to a public meeting or actually get questions and concerns answered about that permit application? Did you know of anybody that actually were affected by those permits that went to those meetings or had questions for people who were advertising the permits?

Resident: Well, I don't know. The mine down there, when I let them strip, well before I give 'em permission to strip, I went over to Oak Hill, I believe it was, and talked to people about my water. It was up on top of the hill from my property down with houses. I had three houses there. I was concerned that they would cut the water off from them. And I told them I wouldn't... I was protesting it about the water. And the company they didn't ask... they come and asked me about drilling - where I wanted the well. And I, ... So they drilled the well some 200 and some feet and they got me good water down there.

Interviewer II: So you went and actually were concerned about how the water impacts, was that? How they would impact your water supply?

Resident: Yeah. Well, I figured that stripping up there on top of the hill they could possibly. 'Cause it was ah, maybe 600 – 700 yards from where my water tank was.

Interviewer II: Did they use blasting techniques back then?

Resident: Oh yeah. Yeah, they blasted.

Interviewer II: Is that what you mean by affecting your water or just

Resident: Well, just cutting the top off of the hill basically could affect it.

Interviewer II: So when you... you had concerns, or expressed your concerns about your water supply to the coal company, they actually came out and drilled you a well? Is that what you said?

Resident: No, I went and talked to the fellas over in Oak Hill that gives them permits. That is where I went to.

Interviewer II: Oh you went to the huh,... was that the State?

Resident: Yes. That is the one that gives it, gives the maps out.

Interviewer II: Ok you went, ...issued the permits and you actually went to them about what your concerns were. Were they the ones that actually, who drilled your well then?

Resident: Well, the company had the well drilled. They didn't, they'd come, the company come and asked me about the, where to drill the well at.

Interviewer II: And that was after you went to the State and expressed your concerns about it. And the State notified the company and told them that you were concerned and they came out and drilled a well for you.

Resident: Yeah. I was protesting from them stripping up there. That was before I let them strip on my place. I told them I wasn't going to let them strip on it until we decided something about it. 'Cause they could say that I give them permission to strip up there, on top of, and it wasn't there fault that the water was messed up. Because I give my permission to you.

Interviewer II: Were you satisfied with the response that you got?

Resident: Yep, yeah they ...

Interviewer II: You felt that they came out and did a good job and responded to you, to your concerns?

Resident: Yep. They drilled me a good well and got good water. Most of the wells along this creek that I know of is, 'course they didn't go as deep as that one did. But ah... I had them test the water, I mean, there is a company that tests your water. What they sell is these... I don't know what you call it, these purifiers or something that takes the sulfur out and stuff. I had him test this one here of mine. I know the spring wasn't bad and it had no sulfur or iron in it. I had them go down and test the one down there and they said it was as good as this one up here.

Interviewer II: Well, that is good. That is real good.

Resident: But I made them, they drove down to the hard rock. They drilled 200 feet down. They got good water.

Interviewer II: That is real good then.

Resident: Yep. Better than what I figured they do.

Interviewer II: You were pleasantly surprised we could say.

Resident: Well, the water seemed like it was good. I mean, before it was tested I ‘course we didn’t know what it was for sure. But id didn’t look like it had any iron or sulfur in it.

Interviewer II: Very good.

Interviewer: Did you, ... I am going to change the subject a little bit from the water but ah, could you tell me a little bit what you think about the sort of future of this community? Do you see it? How would you describe it?

Resident: Well, I don’t know. Some of the people may sell their land for lots and stuff. There are a lot of people wanting to buy them. A fella asked me the other day about buying some of my lot. I told him I wasn’t going to sell any of it. I was gonna give it to my two boys. I was gonna fix it up.

Interviewer: So you think the future is pretty good around here? People are wanting to move in.

Resident: Yeah, there’s people wanting to buy lots and land all the time.

Interviewer: And you don’t think, ... Do you think that the surface mining or the presence of the mining around here changed the future in any way? The way people look at it?

Resident: No, I don’t think.

Interviewer: Good.

Resident: I don’t think it changed it any up from what it would have been if there hadn’t been mines. ‘Course up that place down there where the creek is dammed up down there... But this up through where they use to fill the creek up with stuff, why I don’t think, ... of ‘course the people who lived here like me that kept the creek cleaned out.

Interviewer II: Is there any benefit? What do you see might be used for this bottomland? Here behind your house? Is there any, ... in grassland do you think that is how it will remain?

Resident: Well, it will all depends on the people... my kids with my property... This here goes to my daughter, and the big farm down there goes to the boys. It is just whether they, if they want to sell it off or what, sell all the lots. I can’t say what they will do with it.

Interviewer II: That’s up to them to decide when that time comes.

Resident: Yeah, both boys... I don’t think either one of them will ever come back here to live. One of them built him a home in Georgia. Another built a home up in Linwood.

Interviewer II: Why ah, ... you don't think they would come back? Do you have any idea or reason why they wouldn't want to come back to this area?

Resident: Well they, they just, my boy in Georgia he likes warmer weather and he is a chemical engineer and he is a... well he is a consultant. He travels all over. Well he pretty near... he goes, they got a company in Spain that he works for a good bit. And then he, these other chemical companies for the Unifoam, he is an expert on that.

Interviewer II: Oh interesting.

Resident: I guess he is about the best in the world on it.

Interviewer II: He has his roots settled down south then?

Resident: Yeah. He married a girl, a woman from down there. And his first wife died. They use, he use to work for Union Carbide. And he went, they put him down in Atlanta, Georgia, put him down there. He married this woman that lived at Stone Mountain. Her peoples lived down there so he moved up and went to work for another company in Philadelphia. He was up there about 10 years. And he went back to... he retired from them. Went to down there and built him a home there in Georgia. Now that he's a "specific name" up in the eastern panhandle. And his... he's got two kids up there. And they are both married and live up there in Martinsburg. So his family, his immediate family, I mean his kids and grandchildren they're up there.

Interviewer II: They are all married and have families of their own and they are settled where they want to? There is employment up in those areas too?

Resident: Yeah well they've just got a girl. She lives in Maryland and she got a big huh, oh I don't know how many houses, they got 4, 5, 6 houses and a condominiums up there for rent. So, they are tied up, up there a lot. If I was all three of them, I would just sell this stuff down here and forget about it.

Interviewer: How about you? How come you decided to stay here as long as you have?

Resident: Well, this is my work. I was a farmer. I worked at the farm and the coal mine and I got too old to do either one of them now. I just quit. Draw my social security.

Interviewer II: Yeah. So, did you ever think about leaving when the mining was going on because of what the impacts were?

Resident: No. No I don't. I had no desire at all to move out. After we built this house here in '54 I believe it was. No, I don't have any idea to move at all. I figured when I leaved here I would go in a box.

Interviewer II: So you built this house?

Resident: Yep. I had it built. I didn't build it.

Interviewer II: You had it built? And you moved over across the ...

Resident: Yeah I just lived across the way.

Interviewer II: Over the meadow there?

Resident: Over yond side of the creek. That where the house, there was a house there when I bought the farm.

Interviewer II: Right.

Resident: But I...but I wasn't thinking about moving anywhere....

Interviewer II: So the mining operations didn't deter you? Didn't force you out of the area?

Resident: No. No.

Interviewer II: Didn't impact you in that way that you had to move out of the area?

Resident: No. No. They just caused a little bit more work for me, that's all.

Interviewer: Well you know umm, we pretty much covered most of the questions we wanted to ask you. Did you have anything else that you wanted to talk to about us? About the surface mine being in your community?

Resident: No. Not in here. But I'm sure them people down in the southern part of the State where they're mountaintop, that the flood they had, in my opinion, that was just caused because the coal mine didn't fix... didn't keep it from flooding on them.

Interviewer: Umm hum. Yeah, that could be. There are certainly lots of people looking into that.

Resident: Well, they will have to do it themselves. The legislature ain't going to help them any. They're a bunch of drunks, I think that is the reason they don't do anything that law... make an eight, .08 percent alcohol. If they don't do that and it is going to cost the State millions of dollars if they don't do it. And they don't do nothing to get the drunks off of the road, so,... And them overloaded the coal trucks and they kill people and they don't do nothing about that.

Interviewer: Can I ask you, have you personally been affected by someone that was hurt by a drunk driver?

Resident: Well, I've never been... I've seen...